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ROBERT BURNS;
A Lecture,
DELIVERED BY THE
REV W. MCKENZIE,
BEFORE THE
Mechanics' Institute,
AT RAMSAY.

MONTREAL:
PRINTED BY J. C. BECKET, 38 GREAT SAINT JAMES STREET.
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PREFATORY NOTE.

This Lecture was first delivered before the Mechanics' Institute of Ramsay. Having been earnestly requested by some of those who were then present to allow it to be published, it is now given in this form. The Lecture is substantially the same as when first delivered; but it has been re-written, with some slight alterations and additions.

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Centenary of Robert Burns.

To every Scotchman, a deep sad interest must always belong to the name of Robert Burns. It must always continue to be well worth our while to consider what he was, and what he did—to ponder all the circumstances of his brief and deeply sorrowful career. At the present time—called forth by the centenary of his birth-day—there has been an enthusiastic out-burst of admiration; and there have been words of praise heaped one upon another in a strain of extravagant eulogy, such as, perhaps, no man that ever lived ever fully deserved. I cannot, for my part, sympathise in the present out-burst of enthusiasm. As connected with the name of Robert Burns, such an exhibition seems anything rather than fitting; and besides, in the general, it is false and hollow at the very heart of it, for, I cannot help remembering that the very men who are at the present time loudest in their acclaim of praise, are men manifestly of a kindred spirit to those who, in his lifetime, did much to give an evil warp to the splendid genius of Robert Burns, and thus to imbitter and crush his heart.

Now, I do not pretend to be able to give what may be called a review of Burns: to be able to record fully the true significance of his life; to map out the extent of his genius; to estimate the value of his works; or to characterise all their peculiar excellencies or defects. But yet, there are many detached

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thoughts upon all these points which may be suggested to any thoughtful man. Some such thoughts, which have been suggested to my own mind, I shall try to give ; and give as plainly and clearly as possible, and thereof let every man judge for himself ; only, let no man *pre-judge* the matter.

Burns occupies a much higher place in the minds of men at the present day, than he did during his own lifetime : as we have receded from him in time, he has grown in apparent magnitude. Perhaps, in some obscure and mean quarter of a great city, you stumble unexpectedly on a fair and magnificent building.—The common dwellings of men crowd around it on every side, and allow only a partial view ; you can see its spreading front, and obtain a glimpse of the swelling dome. Not one of the common habitations, singly, can for a moment compare with it, yet they press into notice, and encumber the view ; and because of their mean environment the fair proportions and the real magnitude of the other can only be but imperfectly discerned. But take your way to the overhanging height where, at one view, the whole city is spread out, as upon a map, beneath your eyes, and then the edifice which could be only imperfectly seen while you were involved in the narrow, crooked streets, now stands out in bold relief, dwarfing all around it into their proper insignificance. Farther, and farther, as you recede in space, bolder, and more boldly still, does the object of real magnitude stand out to view ; until, on the far edge of the horizon, when all the common things are swallowed up in the blue distance, it rears its head as a solitary landmark to tell us where the great city lies. So is it with some men as we recede farther and farther from them in time. Amid the mean environments of their

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actual, every day life, and among the crowd of their contemporaries ; they are hidden and obscured ; and, to the men of their own age they are but partially known, and it may be, most inadequately appreciated. The true, and certain test of their real greatness is *time* ; and, when we find that, as we recede from them in time they are not enveloped in a dark and nameless oblivion ; that they are not hidden altogether from our sight by the mists of one or two intervening generations—the fate, alas ! of many very famous men in their own day and generation—when we find that, instead of this, they stand out boldly in relief as a landmark of that time, and that generation during which they flourished ; then we have a proof, patent to all, of a real greatness, of whatsoever sort that may be. So much then we can assert of Robert Burns, that, tried now by the test of time, he appears to be the most notable man of his own country of that generation wherein he flourished. As year after year has gone past, he has been rated higher and higher ; until at the present time, two generations after his death, the voice of eulogy has been raised higher than ever before.

“ Robert Burns, the chief of the peasant poets of Scotland, was born in a little mud-walled cottage on the banks of the Doon, near ‘ Alloway’s auld haunted Kirk,’ in the Shire of Ayr, on the twenty-fifth day of January, seventeen hundred and fifty-nine,” so writes Allan Cunningham, in the opening paragraph of his short and kindly memoir, introducing the complete works of Burns. It is curious to notice how Allan Cunningham here, in the beginning of his first paragraph only claims for Burns the honour of being “ the chief of the *peasant poets* of Scotland.” But, when he has about finished his work, when he is fresh

from the review of all that Burns did, and when his heart has been deeply touched while penning the sad memorials of his last days, then we find him claiming for Burns a higher place than before. "Thus,"—he says at the head of one of his closing paragraphs—"Thus lived and died Robert Burns, the chief of Scottish poets." He no longer claims for him only the first place in the second rank of the poets of our country, but he now claims the first place in the first rank. And perhaps, on a much larger scale, and extending over a much larger period of time, a process has been going on in the minds of men with respect to the standing of Burns as a poet, somewhat similar to that which seems to have had its course in the mind of his biographer, during the time he wrote his memoir, and with the same result.

We can touch but lightly, and briefly on the different periods of the life of Burns. Up till about his twenty-third year he remained under the family roof, and under his father's eye. As far as we seem to have the materials for a judgment, that early period seems to have been the best and the happiest portion of his life. His father was a man of a thoughtful and earnest character ; of a keen observation and insight, and of a reverent, devout heart ; one of those "priest-like father's," of whom his son has given us such an exquisite picture in the "Cottar's Saturday night." Old William Burns did not thrive well in the world ; some fitful seasons of comparative prosperity cheered his humble family circle ; but, as a rule, his life was a hard struggle against poverty, almost his whole energies were expended in keeping want from his door. Yet he did not sink, or faint in the day of adversity. In this respect he was a far stronger man than his gifted son, who might, had he

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been so disposed, have learned some noble lessons in the home where he spent so much of his life. Such a father as he had, with his reverence toward God, and his simple faith in Him, whereby he was able to rise above those adverse circumstances which otherwise would have crushed him to the dust, was a gift of price, far more precious than one bearing an historic name, or possessed of wealth untold, but yet who was destitute of that faith and reverence. There was much to be learned in that home. The balm of natural feeling, and of kindly sympathy shed its fragrance there ; the highest wisdom was not banished from that poor hearth ; and Burns had an eye to appreciate the beauty of those things which invested that humble family circle with dignity and moral grandeur.

Up till the time when Burns left his home it was well with him. But, in his twenty-third year he leaves the paternal roof, he goes forth into the world, he mingles among looser, and more exciting society than heretofore, and soon he becomes initiated into those vices, which many men, in their foolish wisdom, think to be the true and proper preparative for entering on active life, and for taking ones true place among men. "A kind of mud-bath," as one has well said, "in which the youth is, as it were necessitated to steep, and, we suppose, cleanse himself, before the real toga of manhood can be laid on him." Burns, to his loss, was a too apt pupil of such wretched wiseacres ; he plunged into the mud-bath, and to the end of his days he was *not* much the better of it, but rather much the worse. It was well the old man, his father, died before he knew the result of this perilous experiment, for, to him, the sins of his son, both with respect to intemperance and wicked

lewdness, would have brought more shame and sorrow than could have been relieved or healed by joy in his fame as a poet.

Burns was not made more fit for his work in life by his initiation into the pleasant vices, so called, of his jovial friends at Irvine. *Sin*, by whatever pleasant name you call it, is the weakness and the degradation of any man. It is not after we become dissipated that we become men, and are prepared to act our part as men, but rather by not becoming dissipated at all, or, at the very least, *only* when we forsake such a course if it has been begun. A course of dissipation, when continued, shall soon destroy any man, and even when it is short, when a man soon breaks off such a course; yet he comes not scatheless out of it; to the very end of his days it is almost certain to be a cause of weakness to him. Just like some short malignant distemper, which leaves behind a running ulcer as a source of perpetual pain and weakness to the whole body. And then, in the case of Burns, with all those splendid endowments of natural genius he had from the hand of God, it was a far more disgraceful, and therefore dangerous experiment to try, than it was with common men. For him to use his own strong expressive words—

“ To desert fair virtue's way,
In folly's path to go astray,
To exalt the brute, and sink the man.”

was doubly dangerous, and was certain, as it did, to leave its sting behind to the end of his days.

Then, shortly after he left home, Burns fell into acquaintance with a set of divines, called in those days, the new lights, by whom he was welcomed and caressed; and for whom he did good service by the

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composition of his religious satires. It was a dark and melancholy time in Scotland at the end of last century. Moderatism, with its wretched substitute of an imperfect morality, for the power of godliness, reigned supreme, with most baleful influence, in the Kirk, and many indeed almost all who arrogated to themselves the praise of being the truly liberal and enlightened men of the age, and a very poor, unheroic age they made of it after all, many such set themselves in determined opposition to what they called a rigid Calvinism, and they did not seem to know that every blow they dealt was aimed against the foundations of that faith once delivered to the saints. Among such men Burns found himself, he enjoyed and cultivated their society, and in their companionship any little faith or reverence which he might have had, seems to have been finally unsettled and destroyed, and in losing these, he lost well nigh all the strength he had wherewith to maintain any future warfare.

The position of Burns some three or four years after his father's death was pitiable in the extreme. He had not prospered well in the farm of Mossgiel, to which he had removed his mother and the family ; and while trouble hemmed him in his mind was disturbed, burdened, ill at ease. He had no stay for his mind, such as his father had had, no stay on the Blessed God, whereby to continue strong of heart, and steadfast in endeavour, even in the time of sore trial. His own feeling of self-approval and respect had been seriously damaged by his course of dissipation, his character for sobriety was destroyed, and a feeling of despair seems to have been gathering over him dark and thick like a storm cloud, illumined only by the lightnings of remorse. To himself, at this

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time, his whole life appeared to be blasted, his very liberty was in danger, for

hungry ruin had him in the wind and his only refuge seemed to be an exile from his native country. Amid the gloom of that time he wrote his wild farewell to Scotland. "I had taken," he says, "the last farewell of my friends, my chest was on the road to Greenock, and I had composed the last song I should measure in Caledonia." A song in which he pictures his own mental distress: a dark and stormy night seemed to be closing in upon him at that time, gathering fast, and so he sings:—

"The gloomy night is gath'ring fast,
Loud roars the wild inconstant blast;
Yon murky cloud is foul with rain,
I see it driving o'er the plain."

And then, at the thought of being driven into a hopeless exile from his native land, he says:—

"Farewell old Coila's hills and dales,
Her heathy moors and winding vales;
The scenes where wretched fancy roves,
Pursuing past—unhappy loves;
Farewell, my friends! Farewell, my foes!
My peace with these, my love with those,
The bursting tears my heart declare,
Farewell, the bonnie banks of Ayr."

a strange, wild and troubled strain. Nothing could be more abhorrent to his heart than to leave his country, so passionately loved by him, and so he sings his sorrow at the near prospect. But it was not so to be; light began to dawn upon him from a new quarter, "a letter put into his hand, which seemed to light him to brighter prospects," made him turn his face to Edinburgh, where for a little while we shall follow him.

When Burns took his journey to Edinburgh, he

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had no introduction to any one, and he was unacquainted personally, with any one, save Dugald Stewart. At the first he hesitated to call upon the professor, he refrained from making himself known, and he began to negotiate with some obscure publisher for a new edition of his works; this was not the way to make good speed in ridding himself from his difficulties. But soon, accidentally, he was discovered by some of his west country acquaintances, and introduced to the society of the capital. His appearance among the wise, and the learned, the titled, and the great, made a great sensation. He is feasted and flattered; he is welcomed in a sort of triumph, with universal blandishment for a while, and with the highest note of acclamation. Grave professors, and courtly high-born dames, alike unite to do him all honour, beauty and talent alike offer him the incense of praise. It was not an easy thing for Burns, so unaccustomed to such society and scenes, to stand the ordeal; and the simple manly dignity wherewith he took his place, and sustained it among the noble and cultivated circles of Edinburgh, is one of the best proofs we have of his high rank among the nobility of genius. It was no "mockery king" who had made his appearance among the elegant coteries of the city. The sudden elevation vouchsafed to him does not turn his head. As his biographer tells us, "his air was easy and unperplexed, his address was perfectly well-bred, and elegant in its simplicity, he felt neither eclipsed by the titled nor struck dumb before the learned and the eloquent, but took his station with the ease and grace of one born to it." Or, as one of his critics has said, "He stands there on his own basis, cool, unastonished, holding his equal rank from nature herself, put-

ting forth no claim which there is not strength in him, as well as about him, to vindicate." Dugald Stewart says of Burns, at this time, "His manners were simple, manly and independent, strongly expressive of conscious genius and worth, but without any indication of forwardness, arrogance or vanity. He took his share in conversation, but not more than belonged to him. Nothing perhaps was more remarkable among his various attainments, than the fluency and precision and originality of language, when he spoke in company. From his conversation I should have pronounced him to be fitted to excel in whatever walk of ambition he had chosen to exert his abilities." And again, at another time he says, "all the faculties of Burns' mind were, as far as I could judge, equally vigorous," and just so must it ever be with a man of the highest order of genius.— True genius may manifest itself in one special way, or exert its energies in one special department of work ; but that mind where genius of the highest order resides must be comprehensive, many-sided, and expansive ; strong and vigorous in all its powers and faculties ; and able to do any work in any department of mental exertion, better than common men.

But there were other circles in Edinburgh besides those of courtly, high-born dames, and grave learned professors, where Burns was welcomed, and where, to his own damage, he was often to be found. Circles, where wit transgressed the bounds of modesty, where social enjoyment merged into the excesses of intemperance : circles where the wild sally of indecorous mirth, or the pungent scoff at all things sacred, met with the ready echo of uproarious applause. The name of Burns, Allan Cunningham tells us, after

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a while "began to be associated with those of profane wits, and free livers in the city." Poor Burns! These were no fit scenes wherein to mingle for any man; still less for him possessed of all those rich endowments of natural genius. It was a vile degradation for him to sit even as the *King* of a drunken orgie, or to move the laughter of fools by the utterance of spiced blasphemy, or by making a mock at sin. Great genius has great responsibilities. It does not excuse a man for excesses of low riot or debauchery, but rather makes them appear in more than their native deformity, because of their unnatural conjunction with the highest gifts, which have been given for high and worthy ends. And, will any man venture to affirm, that Robert Burns, with that splendid genius of his, the gift of God, that he was true to himself, far less true to Him who made him, in such a use of his talents! Will any man venture to affirm that he was rightly discharging his responsibility, when he was giving zest to scenes of debauchery and sin? I have no sympathy with those men who looked upon Burns merely as a jovial soul, who were always ready to meet him over the glass with a "hail fellow." Those Philistines who robbed him of his true light and strength, and then set him to grind in their own prison-house for their amusement. Such men did much to shorten his days, and embitter his heart; they have robbed us of what we might have had from him, only a few scattered fragments have come to us giving some indication of all we have lost, and I have no sympathy with the men of kindred spirit of our own day, those men who fasten upon the bacchanalian songs of Burns, even with their "broad floods of mirth," or upon his satires, with their hard and sharp impieties, or upon any other of

his loose and foolish utterances. I say I have no sympathy with the men of our own time who would fasten on these as worthy of their highest applause. In doing so, such men make a miserable revelation of their own heart, manifesting an affinity there with all things vile and debasing, and further they just show themselves to be of a kindred spirit to those men who, in his lifetime were the bane and curse of Robert Burns, and were he among them even now, such men would do their best to pervert, degrade, and ruin him. Such men are not to be classed at any time among the friends, or among the true admirers of Burns, but rather in a class just the opposite.

But let us hasten on with his history. After a prolonged stay in Edinburgh the season of triumph and blandishment was succeeded by one of comparative neglect. Burns had many admirers, but hardly any that were wise, and that were true friends. His boon companions, though willing to sun themselves in his humour, and to fool him to the top of his bent, were not the men to whom he could look in the time of his real need, for any wise advice, or for any effectual help, and so Burns began to see that if he was to attain and secure any permanent benefit, he must rely upon himself. His scheme of life, as far as we can see, does not seem to have been so very ill-judged. He sought, and obtained a post in the excise, and he was offered, and accepted a farm, which he had on the terms which he himself proposed. He left Edinburgh to carry his scheme into execution; he left the city much richer in fame, and somewhat richer in purse than when he came there; for, not only had he surmounted his embarrassments of debt, but after his settlement with his bookseller, he carried with him somewhere about four hundred pounds.

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His future comfort, and worldly independence seemed to depend on his own perseverance, in working out his own scheme of life. "The farm and the excise exhibit the poet's humble scheme of life,"—says his biographer "the money of the one, he thought, would support the toil of the other, and in the fortunate management of both, he looked for the rough abundance, if not the elegancies suitable to a poet's condition."

In connection with this point, there is a querulous tone of complaint pervading the memoir of Allan Cunningham, which does not seem to be justified by the facts which he himself narrates. He talks about his "ungrateful country," "sordid meanness," "coldness and neglect," "abuse of the sacred trust of patronage," and other such like platitudes. And he laments that such a genius was "driven to live by the sweat of his brow" or "degraded to the plow and the excise." Now, all that in the face of the simple narrative sounds very much like nonsense; and it is as false in sentiment, as it seems uncalled for by the circumstances of the case. There was no degradation involved in Burns going to his farm, in his being required to labour for a maintenance; no degradation even in poverty, and Burns would not have been slow to tell his biographer that, and to repudiate indignantly such a sentiment.

"Is there for honest poverty,
That hangs his head and a' that,
The coward slave, we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that."

If a man be but true to himself, it is beyond the power of outward circumstances to degrade him.—And besides, Burns was a very proud man; the patronising help which might have been gladly received

by some, would have been disdainfully rejected by him. His own humble scheme of life was far more in accordance with his natural spirit. Indeed, the mere want of means, the pressure of actual poverty, does not seem to have been his special burden. For long after this time, when solicited to contribute some lyrics for Thomson's collection of Scottish songs, he made it one condition of his compliance that he should receive no remuneration in the shape of money, and even later, he resented as an affront, the sending of a small check on the bank, and warned Thomson to do so no more unless he wished to quarrel with him, so much for his position, and his own feelings on this point.

His scheme of life, however, did not succeed. After a trial of about three years he had to give up his farm, into the reasons for which step it is not needful that we should enter. Thereafter, he removed with his family into the town of Dumfries, where he continued to reside the few last years of his life.

In almost all the works of Burns, in his songs especially, very many of which were written during these latter days, there are the marks of the highest poetical genius. The true poet does not need to go far for a subject, all nature is the volume in which he reads; and he has sympathies with all things around him, animate and inanimate. In description, there is a decisive power in Burns which fixes the very image of the thing clear and bright before the mind. Two or three of his winged words do far more than a page of laboured prose; and thus, from his own day our national literature has been be-gemmed with his own word pictures. His eye was open to see the beauty there is in all things, and there was a chord which vibrated in his heart, as he listened to their voice.—

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He noted the rain-cloud as it hurried on, the gowan, crushed beneath his plowshare, awakened a strain of low, sad music in his heart. "I have some favourite flowers in spring," he says in one of his letters, "among which are the mountain-daisy, the harebell, the fox-glove, the wild-brier rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight." And again "I never hear the loud solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of gray plover in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry." Burns is a true poet, "he loves the green earth with her streams and forests, her flowery leas and eternal skies, loves her with a sort of passion, in all her vicissitudes of light and shade; his spirit revels in her grandeur and charms; expands like the breeze over wood and lawn, over glade and dingle, stealing and giving odours." And so also with all the various aspects of human life. He has a fervid sympathy, a reverence, a tenderness, which go straight to the hearts of men. "He has a resonance in his bosom for every note of human feeling," the high and low, the grave or gay—through the whole gamut of sadness, despondency, fear, pity, hope, mirth and joy; all are alike welcome to him; he can move them in the hearts of men, just as he himself has been moved by them. Many of his words have spoken responsive, and shall continue so to speak, to the hearts of all men.

No one can fail to mark the intense nationality of Burns. There is a deep pathos in that recorded wish of his:—

"A wish—I mind its power,
A wish, that to my latest hour
Will strongly heave my breast.
That I for poor auld Scotland's sake,

Some usefu' plan or book could make,
 Or sing a sang at least.
 The rough bur Thistle spreading wide
 Among the bearded bear,
 I turned my weeding-clips aside,
 And spared the symbol dear."

From first to last, the love of country, "a tide of Scottish prejudice," as he himself modestly calls it, swelled high up in his heart. In all his personal cares and distresses this never left him, and in the indulgence of this feeling he seems to escape from the dark clouds which so often hung above him, into the light and sunshine. We cannot but love to see the manifestation of this deep and generous feeling; it is, perhaps, the best and noblest of all his characteristics, that one, at least, which is maintained throughout with the most perfect consistency; and as a Scotchman we cannot help sympathizing with it. This strong national feeling in the heart of Burns gave the key note to some of his noblest strains. It burns in every word of—

"Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled."

by far the finest war-hymn that exists in any language. The feeling dictated oftentimes the choice of subjects, and at all times the homely Scottish dialect—our loved mother-tongue. It is to Burns, above all men, that we are indebted for the revival of a national tinge and spirit in our literature. It shall be a sad day indeed, that day—which I hope shall never come—when Scotsmen shall be ashamed of Scotland; when love to their own mother-land shall die out of their hearts. Men may call it prejudice, or narrow-mindedness, or by any other hard name they please, but for our part we must confess that a man always rises in our estimation, when we can see the love of his country—whatever that country may be—strong in his heart.

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And how then, it may be asked, with that splendid genius we ascribe to him, was it that Burns achieved so little? And that his life was what it was? We might give a two-fold answer. Because, he was not true to himself: And—Because he was not true to his God above.

It was not untoward outward circumstances, except in a very slight measure, that oppressed him, and made his life so sad, and his works so imperfect. These are not able to crush a man true to himself, and to his vocation. Such an one is able to rise above them, to bring them under his feet; and one of the noblest chapters in the history of genius is that where we see it triumphing over difficulties, subduing adverse circumstances beneath it; and, in spite of them all, achieving its true and great work. Milton—merely looking to outward things—was not so well dealt with in his latter days as Burns was. Milton for a while occupied a place far higher in the social scale than ever Burns did, and his fall, at the last, was far greater than his. Those events which dashed to the earth all the splendid hopes of Milton, of a new era being about to dawn on the destinies of his country, consigned him to poverty and neglect. He was barely tolerated by those in power; old age began to creep in upon him, an old age oppressed with poverty; and, worst of all, his sight began to fail, and soon he was left in darkness. And yet, Milton, in his poor and blind old age, took his harp and awoke the highest strain which has yet been uttered in our own tongue. But Burns, especially in his latter days, besides having to battle with adversity, was at variance with himself. His mind seems to have been a battlefield, where a stern, ceaseless, and losing conflict was

waged, a conflict between his own sense of right, and his sense of wrong-doing. The way of transgressors is very hard. He had lost his feeling of self-approval, he had made shipwreck of a good conscience, and that in defiance of the light that was in him. He could say many noble things about that which was lovely and virtuous, but he most miserably failed in acting them out. For example. What can be truer and finer than this?

"Is there, in human form, that bears a heart,
A wretch! a villain! lost to love and truth!
That can, with studied, sly, ensnaring art,
Betray sweet Jenny's unsuspecting youth?
Curse on his perjured arts! dissembling smooth!
Are honour, virtue, conscience, all exil'd?
Is there no pity, no relenting ruth,
Points to the parents fondling o'er their child?
Then paints the ruined maid, and their distraction wild?"
who could imagine, while reading that, that he himself was guilty—doubly guilty—in this very thing.

Take another example. In another of his pieces we come unexpectedly on a train of somewhat serious thought—

'But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white, then melts forever;
Or like the borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form,
Evanishing amid the storm."

And what are all these beautiful thoughts meant to adorn? The winding up of the carousal of a tippling cobbler with a drunken farmer—

"Nae man can tether time or tide:
The hour approaches Tam maun ride."

And was it worthy of Burns to be merely the chief of such good-fellows—falsely so-called; and to try, with the light of his God-given genius, to glorify all

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their mad excesses to riot? We trow not.

Take one other example. Burns could not only see the beauty, but he could estimate the worth of those things which were really beautiful and excellent. What a fine picture of domestic happiness and piety he has given us in the "Cottar's Saturday Night," of which the original was the home of his youth. A spirit of reverent piety animates the whole scene.—The high praises of God, and the fervent prayer to Him, are special features of it; shedding over all the calm, still sunshine of peace.

"From scenes like these, old Scotia's grandeur springs,
That makes her lov'd at home, rever'd abroad."

Nothing more than the simple truth. But, O how very different "scenes like these" are, to those with which the name of Robert Burns is associated! What a difference between these, and those other scenes where the "praise of whiskey" took the place of the "praise of God;" and where the scoff or blasphemy took the place of the reverent prayer to God. It was not possible for Burns to mingle in those other scenes as he did, and escape a stern conflict with his outraged conscience. He knew the good, and he chose the evil; and knowing this, he felt that he was neither true nor just to himself. It was a most vile degradation to him to reign, even as a king—in those other scenes—to be such a king as he himself describes.

"Wha first shall rise to gang awa'

A cuckold, coward loon is he!

Wha last beside his chair shall fa,

He is the king amang us three!"

No genius could ever exalt that sentiment above the rank of *brutish*. In the mouth of Burns it is something exactly the opposite of what is meant by a "jewel of gold in a swine's snout." Now, knowing

the good, yet choosing the evil, was one of those questions which he could not settle with himself, and which, pressing for a settlement, darkened and embittered his life. No man can make his life a vain, empty show; a mere mask or revel; or spend it in hollow laughter and empty mirth, without abiding a sure and stern retribution.

"Not *many* lives, but only *one* have we,
How sacred should that one life ever be;
We have no time to sport away the hours,
All must be *earnest* in a world like ours."

And less than most could Burns so use *his* life.—
Great gifts are a great burden and a great curse, if they are not used to the glory of the giver. And the man must answer to *himself*, as well as to God above, for the wrong or unworthy use of them.

But then, was Burns true to his God? Can any one really affirm this? His living faith in God kept Milton from being utterly crushed under the troubles of his latter days. He says—

"I am old and blind,
Men point at me as smitten by God's frown,
Afflicted and deserted of my kind,
Yet I am not cast down.

I am weak, yet strong—
I murmur not that I no longer see;
Poor, old, and helpless, I the more belong,
Father supreme! to Thee.

Thy glorious face
Is beaming towards me, and its holy light
Shines in upon my dwelling-place,
And there is no more night."

O that Burns could have so spoken at any time, for God is a refuge in trouble, a stronghold in the time of need. But Burns knew not Him whose name is a strong tower. There is something unexpressibly sad in the tone of his few devotional pieces.

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"O Thou great being! what thou art,
Surpasses me to know."

Or again, "O thou unknown, almighty cause, &c."

In such manner does he make his approach to Him who is revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Something like the purblind philosophers of heathen Athens, groping in darkness after the living God, if haply they may feel after Him, and find Him, and with the dim feeling of their want, building an altar to the unknown God. The morality of Burns was nothing more than that of a mere worldly man. He had neither high principles, nor high ends: enjoyment, of a finer or coarser sort, is the only thing he seems to long for, or strive for. He has no higher guiding star, there is only a transient glance now and then to those things which are nobler and better—he does not live in their region at all. Indeed, Burns has in reality no religion, no faith in the blessed God. "He lives in darkness and in the shadow of doubt." At the best, he seems to have only an anxious wish, a dark peradventure—reaching on to eternity.

Burns claims from us a far profounder interest as a *man*, than as a *poet*. There are few more heart-touching histories recorded than that of his latter days. When he finally took up his residence in Dumfries, his habits of sobriety were hopelessly broken up; his peace of mind was gone for ever; and his heart was bitter, partly against his fellow-men—most of all against himself. When we think of all he was, it sounds like harsh discord to have his name blared out by the hundred tongues of a public festival; it seems a mockery to choose the ball-room as the place to recal his memory; it is unfitting that his name should burden the cheers of boon-companions; it should be uttered softly, and we should remember him in the quite still hour of thought, when the soul is

open to all solemn influences. There is unutterable sadness in the sight of that richly gifted spirit, so noble and gentle without,—wearing itself away in hopeless warring against those vile entanglements wherewith he was environed,—which held him closely in their embrace, coiling round him closer and closer, until death opened its door. He lost the battle which he waged against them. And so he died.—His light went out in profound darkness. No gospel hope shed a brightness on his path at eventide ; there was no remembrance of that one only name. given among men, whereby we must be saved—no mention of it. In this matter, we are willing to stand upon the word of the living God in the face of all the notions and sentimentalities of men. And if that eternal word be true, then, in charity to the living who know that they too must die, no man can say that there was hope in his death. *As he lived. So he died.*

But what a sight of pity and of fear we have in that fitful life, and darksome death of his. Words of saddest lamentation rise up in the heart unbidden. "How are the mighty fallen! Ye mountains of Gilboa let there be no dew, nor rain upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is viely cast away. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle!" The goodly ship, lost outside the haven, not in storm or tempest, but shattered on the sunken rocks by the careless pilot, and going down amid the hungry waves, leaving only a few scattered wrecks of the precious freight it bore.

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